DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 354 823 HE 026 243

AUTHOR	Holdaway, Edward A.; And Others
TITLE	Program Reviews: Practices and Lessons.
INSTITUTION	Canadian Society for the Study of Higher Education.
PUB DATE	91
NOTE	23p.
AVAILABLE FROM	Canadian Society for the Study of Higher Education, 151 Slater St., Ottawa, Ontario K1P 5N1, Canada ($3 Canadian).
PUB TYPE	Reports - Descriptive (141) -- Collected Works - Serials (022)
JOURNAL CIT	CSSHE Professional File; n9 Fall 1991
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	Accreditation (Institutions); College Outcomes Assessment; Cost Effectiveness; *Educational Assessment; Educational Facilities; *Educational Quality; Foreign Countries; Formative Evaluation; Higher Education; *Institutional Evaluation; Mission Statements; Models; *Program Evaluation; Program Improvement; Resource Allocation; Review (Reexamination); Universities
IDENTIFIERS	*Canada; *University of Alberta (Canada)

ABSTRACT

From 1980 to 1991, the University of Alberta undertook systematic reviews of all its academic and support units mostly for program improvement purposes, but also to acquire information for planning and budget decisions. This report responds to a 1988 request to examine the University's 1980-1988 experience with program reviews and to recommend future action. It outlines relevant literature concerning the review process, the review practices used in some Canadian universities, the review process used at the University of Alberta, the issues involved, the findings and recommendations of the examining committee, and suggestions for postsecondary institutions. In addition, the report provides an evaluation of the President's Advisory Committee on Campus Review, the committee that organized the review process, including cost-benefit relationships, follow-up activities, and overall impressions. The report reveals a positive response to the review process and presents the recommendation that all postsecondary institutions be involved in some form of continuous review activity. Contains 50 references. (GLR)

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Canadian Society for the Study of Higher Education

La société canadienne pour l'étude de l'enseignement supérieur

ED354823

Number 9 Fall 1991

CSSHE Professional File

Program Reviews: Practices and Lessons

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CSSHE Professional File

The purpose of the Professional File is to present one or more possible solutions to a current problem in post-secondary education. The solutions that are described have been found to be effective on at least one campus. Topics and authors are approved by the Publications Committee and the Executive Council of CSSHE. The Professional File is published up to four times per year by CSSHE and is distributed free of charge to CSSHE members. Professional File #2 described a program review process as it was implemented at the University of Alberta. Professional File #8 briefly describes programs reviews at some other Canadian colleges and universities and provides an update of the University of Alberta's program review process after ten years of implementation. This File has four co-authors, all of whom have been personally involved in the review process. Dr. Holdaway and Dr. Crawford were members of the committee which recommended that a systematic review process be established on campus and then prepared the preliminary policies and procedures. Dr. Harris served as Chairman of the President's Advisory Committee on Campus Reviews (PACCR) from 1980 to 1991. Prior to that appointment, he was Chairman of the Department of Chemistry. Dr. Crawford was Chairman of the President's Committee which examined the University's experience with the reviews after eight years and recommended procedures for a second cycle of reviews. Dr. Meekison served as Vice-President (Academic) from 1984 to 1991 and was closely associated with the review process.

Your comments and suggestions regarding this series are always welcome.

Norman Uhl and Gilles Jasmin, Co-editors

Program Reviews: Practices and Lessons

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ABSTRACT

Many universities in North America and elsewhere instituted various systems of reviews of their programs in the 1970s and 1980s. Program improvement was a common reason for such action, but providing information for planning and budget decisions was also important. Canadian universities use review formats which vary in purpose and scope.

From 1980 to 1991, the University of Alberta undertook systematic reviews of all its academic and support units: these were organized by the four-person President's Advisory Committee on Campus Reviews (PACCR). The main elements were preparation of a Self-Study Report, a site visit and preparation of a report by a four- or five-person Unit Review Committee, and preparation of a response by the unit. Various meetings were then held involving the President, PACCR, the unit head, and others. Long-term follow-up activities were carried out 18 months later.

In 1988 the President established a committee to examine the University's 1980-1988 experience with program reviews and to recommend future action. This committee recommended continuation of the review process, but in a modified form. However, the University decided in 1991 not to initiate a second cycle of program reviews at this time.

SOMMAIRE

Au cours des deux dernières décennies, en Amérique comme ailleurs dans le monde, plusieurs universités ont entrepris des évaluations destinées à améliorer leurs programmes. Ces évaluations devaient également permettre d'assembler l'information nécessaire à une meilleure planification organisationnelle et budgétaire. Les évaluations réalisées par les universités canadiennes sont très diverses, autant dans leurs méthodes que dans leurs objectifs.

Entre 1980 et 1991, l'Université de l'Alberta a réalisé des évaluations systématiques de chacune des unités d'enseignement, de recherche et d'administration de sa structure organisationnelle. Un comité consultatif de quatre personnes, relevant du bureau du Recteur, a été chargé de la coordination de l'opération (*President's Advisory Committee on Campus Reviews -- PACCR*). Toutes ces évaluations avaient en commun les éléments suivants: une auto-évaluation par chaque unité, un examen sur place et un rapport d'évaluation préparé par un comité indépendant composé de 4 ou 5 personnes, et enfin, un contre-rapport préparé par l'unité. Au terme de cette phase de l'opération, diverses réunions ont été tenues auxquelles ont participé le Recteur, le comité consultatif, les chefs d'unités et divers autres personnes intéressées. Un suivi a été fait dix-huit mois plus tard.

En 1988, le Recteur a chargé un groupe de travail de faire le bilan des évaluations réalisées depuis 1980 et de proposer des orientations pour l'avenir. Ce groupe de travail a recommandé que les évaluations se poursuivent, mais dans une forme modifiée. En 1991, l'Université a décidé de ne pas entreprendre un second cycle d'évaluations, du moins dans l'immédiat.

Reviews of academic and support units in postsecondary institutions have become increasingly common in the United States, Canada, and certain other countries since about 1970. In 1980, the University of Alberta initiated a system of reviews of its 80 academic and 50 support units; the primary purpose was improvement of quality of operations. These reviews, organized by the President's Advisory Committee on Campus Reviews (PACCR), involved preparation of a Self-Study Report by each unit, an assessment by a Unit Review Committee, and a response by each unit. The procedures were little altered during the 1980-1991 period. Determination of actions based upon recommendations in the reports was the responsibility of the department, the dean/director, or the President and appropriate Vice-President. In 1988, a committee established to examine the PACCR process recommended establishment of a second cycle of reviews, with some modifications in procedures. However, after completing reviews of virtually every academic and support unit on campus from 1980 to 1991, the University of Alberta decided not to initiate a second cycle of program reviews at this time.

This paper outlines relevant literature, the review practices used in some Canadian universities, the review process used at the University of Alberta, the issues involved, the findings and recommendations of the examining committee, and suggestions for postsecondary institutions.

RELEVANT LITERATURE AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

This brief review of relevant literature is based upon that provided in the *CSSHE Professional File # 2* by Harris and Holdaway (1987). Because much of the content provided below appears in many different publications, not all of the sources listed in the References are included in the text of this paper.

The various purposes of program review at universities have been identified as follows: (a) to improve programs; (b) to inform decision-makers about strengths and weaknesses of programs; (c) to help institutions make decisions about installation, continuation, modification, expansion, or termination of programs; (d) to provide information for planning; (e) to determine the relative status of programs with respect to either specified standards or other programs; (f) to help an institution make decisions concerning expenditure reductions and increases in efficiency; and (g) to demonstrate accountability.

After noting that only three Australian universities were conducting reviews routinely, Taylor et al. (1988) listed these benefits from regular reviews:

> 1. they will be more valuable and effective than if they are in response to some crisis, when individuals may feel under threat;
>
> 2. they provide an opportunity for self-study and stocktaking at regular intervals;
>
> 3. the collection of the performance data, which are to form part (but only a part) of the raw material of the reviews, is simpler if it is carried out as a regular routine, and in addition this allows trends to be appreciated. (pp. 4–5)

Further, Wilson (1987) noted that although "many features of our society work against these evaluations . . . the importance of the task and the very subtlety and complexity of its goals make assessment compelling for those who commit themselves to higher education" (p. 238). However, Skolnik (1989) offered an important caution: "The central focus in most program review [in higher education] is quality. Yet the literature on quality emphasizes that quality remains an elusive concept. . . ." (p. 627). As program reviews became common in North America, their scope increased, their procedures became more standardized, and they have been increasingly demanding of resources (Harpel, 1986).

In this paper, "program" refers to a department or cluster of departments rather than to academic programs. "Program review," then, is a comprehensive description and assessment of the history, current performance, and future plans and prospects for a department. Different universities use different review procedures. Some concentrate upon units, some upon programs, and others upon graduate programs of individual departments. Harpel (1986) stated that "there is no single correct method for performing program review" (p. 2).

Program reviews have also received considerable attention in Australia. As noted by Taylor et al. (1988):

> The process of national reviews of disciplines has already begun with Law, Medicine and Engineering, and should undoubtedly be continued, but given the extent of the subjects to be reviewed and the resources which might be devoted to such an exercise, it is unlikely that any one area will be reviewed more often than once in every fifteen or twenty years. On the other hand it ought to be possible for institutions to conduct their own internal reviews more frequently, so that every academic unit could be reviewed at least every ten years. (p. 4)

Conrad and Wilson (1985) considered that "program reviews at most universities draw heavily on one or more of several models: goal-based, responsive, decision-making, or connoisseurship" (p. iv). They saw the *goal-based model* (Tyler, 1949) as being the most influential. The *responsive model* (Scriven, 1972) addresses program issues, activities, and concerns, regardless of goals. Linking evaluations with decision making is seen to be the main contribution of the *decision-making model* (e.g., Stufflebeam et al., 1971). The *connoisseurship model* (Eisner, 1975) relies heavily on expert opinion, valued because of superior knowledge and expertise and a common value system.

Several writers (e.g., Craven, 1980, p. 434) have emphasized the need to evaluate the review processes used at universities, i.e., to "review the reviews." Wilson (1987) concluded that "although . . . [department] reviews have become more common over the last twenty years, they have not been much thought about or analyzed until quite recently," and that "we are, in fact, quite ignorant of the actual effects induced by the department review process" (p. 238).

With respect to the benefits and costs of reviews, various authors have proposed similar lists. The most commonly mentioned benefits are as follows: (a) matters which are frequently ignored have to be examined; (b) planning is facilitated; (c) a greater sense of "community" may be generated in a unit; (d) those likely to be affected by changes are involved in the discussions and are therefore more likely to be knowledgeable and receptive; (e) the institutional image can be improved; and (f) qualitative information is provided to balance typical

institutional data. The major costs are identified as either direct-- salaries, honoraria, travel and subsistence, supplies, and photocopying--or indirect--increased workload for members of the unit and for senior administrators. To improve the ratio of benefits to costs, these suggestions have been made: (a) concentrate upon major objectives; (b) collect only the most relevant data; (c) use a credible, acceptable, continuing review system; (d) use effective and timely communications; and (e) concentrate more upon evaluation than data collection.

Following their assessment of universities' experiences, Conrad and Wilson (1985) concluded that opinions are divided over the impact of reviews--some see them as beneficial, some as making no difference, and some as having negative impacts. Taylor et al. (1988) drew these conclusions:

> Finally, it must be recognized that there is no point in conducting reviews or evaluations unless their outcomes have some effect, and influence the future operations of an institution.
>
> ... there must also exist mechanisms whereby the results of an evaluation ... can be regularly incorporated in the academic planning and management processes of institutions. This is one of the reasons for the recommendation that the evaluations and reviews should be conducted as a matter of routine rather than as something exceptional. (p. 5)

Conrad and Wilson (1985) recommended that "given the plethora of program reviews at all levels of higher education, the need to study the effects of such reviews more systematically is urgent" (p. vii).

Another aspect relevant to reviews involves the increasingly common use of performance indicators in higher education. However, as Taylor et al. (1988) noted, such "indicators are an aid to good judgement and not a substitute for it" (p. 1). They continued:

> The need for institutions to be accountable and transparent can best be met not by the collection of indicators as such, but by their use in the context of a process of expert review. In that process, performance indicators form part of the necessary raw material of evaluation and assessment. These reviews give rise to judgements and decisions which, though they may make use of information supplied by the collection of data such as performance indicators, are, in the end, made by individuals or groups of people. (pp. 1-2)

The major elements of program reviews at universities are represented in Figure 1. This conceptual framework can readily be modified according to different institutional or personal perspectives.

PROCEDURES USED IN CANADIAN UNIVERSITIES

In order to obtain an overview of the procedures used in other Canadian universities, the Vice-Presidents (Academic) of 17 universities across Canada were asked in September 1990 to provide information about their program reviews. Replies were obtained from all Vice-Presidents. Considerable diversity was apparent in the approaches used; these were analyzed using the dimensions identified below.

Of the 17 universities, nine used a structured, cyclical approach, five a structured, non-cyclical approach, and two a non-structured, non-cyclical approach. The identified frequencies of cyclical review for each unit or program ranged from 5 to 10 years. The most common approach was exemplified by Manitoba where each faculty, school, and department was reviewed at least once every seven years using standardized procedures for both the self-study and external review under the supervision of an Academic Review Committee. Also, all Ontario graduate programs were subject to review by the Ontario Council on Graduate Studies.

Concerning the review focus, 12 universities identified academic units/programs, while 3 of these also identified support units. The graduate and undergraduate programs were specifically identified as foci by 3 and 5 universities,

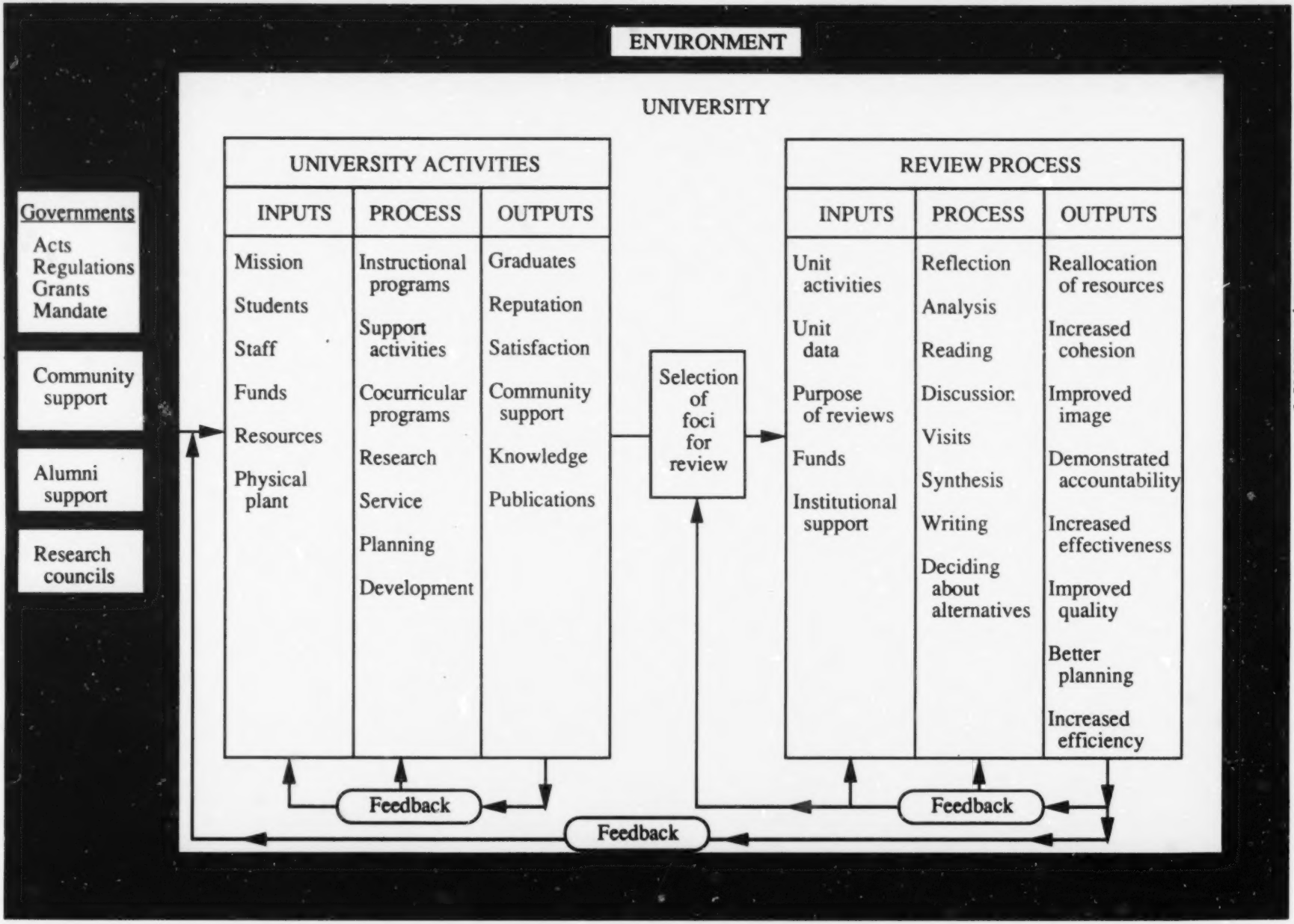

Figure 1. Conceptual model for reviews of university programs

respectively. At Dalhousie, for more than 15 years, departmental graduate programs have been evaluated at five to seven-year intervals, while undergraduate reviews "have often been held in conjunction with the appointment of departmental chairpersons."

Eight of the described procedures had been approved by the university senate whereas two had received final approval by Vice-Presidents. With respect to the group or person in charge, considerable variation was obvious. In two universities, the senate was identified, in five others a senate committee, while in two more a non-senate committee was in charge. Vice-presidents organized the reviews on two campuses. At St. Francis Xavier University, the Committee on Academic Reviews consisted of the Academic Vice-President, Vice-President Administration, Dean of Arts, Dean of Science, and five tenured Faculty members (three-year terms) elected by a University Senate; the President appoints the Chair for a three-year term.

The most commonly identified objective of the review process was improving academic performance (mentioned by 8 of the 16 universities); also identified were obtaining information for planning, budgeting, and setting priorities (5), ascertaining the extent to which objectives are met (4), ascertaining the extent to which community needs are met (4), assessing the calibre of a unit or program (2), developing departments (1), and assessing the suitability of objectives (1).

The general procedure employed in the responding Canadian universities included a self-study report, a review committee report following a site visit, and a unit response. Eight of the ten universities which provided information about their self-study reports specified details about what was to be included; one university had precise requirements, while another had broad, general guidelines. Only McGill University seemed to use a policy of public disclosure of the results of reviews, using *The McGill Reporter* for this purpose.

The final aspect involves the composition of unit review committees. Use of two external reviewers was the most common practice, with or without varying numbers of internal reviewers. Input was usually obtained from the unit about suitability of the external reviewers. General guidelines were commonly provided for the unit review committees with respect to their activities while on campus and the nature of their reports. Disposition of reports and appropriate follow-up activities were usually identified in the descriptions of procedures.

UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA PROCEDURES

Because detailed description of the program review procedures used at the University of Alberta was published earlier (Harris, and Holdaway, 1987), the information provided below briefly summarizes that article and supplements it with new content.

Background

In December 1990 the University of Alberta had an enrollment of 21,871 full-time undergraduate students in 17 faculties and one school, 2,807 full-time graduate students in 78 departments, and 4,373 part-time students. The program review process had its origin in a Universities Priorities Committee recommendation in 1978--when full-time undergraduate and graduate enrollments were considerably smaller, being 16,757 and 2,007--that reviews of all programs and units be initiated. After considerable discussion and assessment of procedures used at other institutions, the University endorsed these principles and procedures:

1. The goal should be production of information that would serve as a reliable basis for planning and program improvement.

2. Administration of reviews should be readily understood, effective, efficient, responsive, flexible, credible, and realistic.

3. A small President's Advisory Committee on Academic Reviews (PACAR) should be established to organize the reviews.

4. PACAR will advise the President on the sequence of units to be reviewed and the composition of Unit Review Committees (URCs), will advise units and URCs about procedures, and will transmit reports to the President.

5. Each unit will prepare a Self-Study Report.

6. The URC for a unit will consist of two members of the same discipline from outside the University, one from a related discipline within the University, and one from the University-at-large.

7. The reviews will be conducted over several years.

8. Each URC should consult actively with students, staff, recent graduates, and employers of graduates if appropriate.

9. The Vice-President (Academic) will be responsible for monitoring action taken on recommendations.

Soon after PACAR began operating, the University also decided to review all administrative/support units (hereinafter called "support units"), and the committee's name was changed to the President's Advisory Committee on Campus Reviews (PACCR). Four members of PACCR were appointed in 1980. For most of the 11-year period, it consisted of a Chairman (a professor emeritus), two professors emeriti, and the Director of Technical Services. The following principles guided PACCR's operations: (a) the reviews are to promote forward-looking change and high-quality scholarship; (b) multiple benefits will be expected; (c) considerable flexibility and minimum direction will be emphasized; (d) a limited number of reviews will be conducted initially; (e) PACCR and accreditation reviews will coincide whenever possible; and (f) sensationalism will be avoided and confidentiality respected. PACCR decided that a balance was required between numerical data, descriptive information, and evaluation. For several years the Office of Institutional Research and Planning provided standard sets of data for many units to use in their self-study activities.

Overall Process

In 1980-81, a cautious start was made with only five units so that workable procedures could be developed. After the first year about 15 units were reviewed annually. The units then completed a Self-Study Report (SSR) which typically took 6 to 12 months. SSRs were expected to address unit history, current status, key issues, strengths, areas for improvement, strategies for and commitments to changes, and roles of individuals and groups.

The Unit Review Committees (URCs) sometimes included one member of a relevant profession. The units provided nominations for the external and internal-related members of the URCs. PACCR then discussed with the heads of the units both these nominations and their own nomination for the member-at-large. Until 1989, the list of nominees was submitted to the President for approval. The 177 Canadian reviewers which have been used came from 26 different universities and 13 outside agencies in 9 provinces. The University of British Columbia and the University of Toronto provided the most reviewers. The 66 United States reviewers came from 37 universities and 3 outside agencies in 23 states.

The SSR and relevant background information were forwarded to each URC member. URCs were asked to address strengths and weaknesses of the department's teaching and

research programs, staff and staff workloads, adequacy of the resources provided, effectiveness of the organization of the department, relations of the department with others, its plans for the future, opportunities for improving the department's programs, its relations with internal units and external organizations, and possibilities for better utilization of resources available.

Each URC sent its report to PACCR; it was then forwarded to the President and to the unit which prepared a Unit Response. PACCR members then met with the unit head to discuss the main features of the three reports and the conclusions. Following this meeting, PACCR also prepared a confidential summary for the President who discussed this summary with the PACCR members; the appropriate Vice-President joined this discussion in 1989. Separate discussions of the SSR, the URC Report, and the Unit Response then occurred involving the President, the unit head, the vice-president/dean/director to whom the unit head reported, and, a few months later, the Planning and Priorities Committee. Administrators were free to take action at any time on the recommendations. Appropriate Vice-Presidents were responsible for follow-up activities. When Dr. Horowitz was President, he administered the budgeted funds available for implementing some of the recommendations made by the URCs, after consultation with the Vice-Presidents. Dr. Davenport, the current President, used a different approach: he received recommendations from the Vice-Presidents and reported them to the Planning and Priorities Committee.

Two modifications were made in 1985. First, after meeting with the President to discuss reports, PACCR wrote a confidential letter to URC members to report the results of the review to date. Second, about 18 months later PACCR brought to the attention of the Vice-President (Academic) those short and long-term matters whose disposition needed reviewing.

The PACCR Chairman, who held a 0.5 FTE appointment, made initial contact with the units, monitored programs, established the URCs, and generally directed the PACCR Office. He was assisted by a full-time Coordinator who interacted continually with the units being reviewed. When PACCR members were not readily available, the Coordinator had authority to act on behalf of PACCR.

No PACCR reviews were conducted in 1980-1991 of departmentalized faculties following reviews of their individual departments. The Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research, which has responsibility for overall coordination of graduate programs, underwent a regular PACCR review in 1986-87. The only major deviation from established procedures was that the URC Report was distributed to all departments having graduate programs; this was deemed desirable because matters identified in the Report affected most academic departments.

Information about the PACCR process was widely distributed on campus, and several related articles were published in refereed journals throughout the 1980s. Also, at the request of the Chair of the Board of Governors, the *Tenth Annual Report* of PACCR was distributed to all members of the provincial legislature, all members of parliament from northern Alberta, the mayor and all aldermen of the City of Edmonton, and several prominent local business leaders.

Issues

As could be expected, the comprehensive review procedure generated several issues. The following issues which were addressed in the *Professional File # 2* (1987) are not included in this paper: membership on URCs, nature of URC reports, time problems, review of support units, rank ordering of units, involvement of students in reviews, teaching loads, the teaching-research relation, unit renewal and resources, and reviews of professional departments. In this section, 13 other issues are presented alphabetically. Most of them were identified by

some of the URCs.

Administration of academic units. URCs frequently commented that the structure and administration of units were often given insufficient attention because they were viewed as of lesser importance than academic activities. However, inadequate administration can adversely affect the experience of students. A common criticism by URCs was overinvolvement of staff in committees. Also, most URCs did not approve of assigning the program counselling of students to administrative officers.

Aging equipment. Scientific and technical equipment must be kept current and in good working condition if students are to receive relevant education and if universities are to be at the forefront of research and advancement of knowledge. This is expensive, but, if units are to be effective, these actions must be taken.

Communications. Many URCs commented on the need for better external and internal communications for both academic and support units. Almost without exception, the URCs pointed out the need for support units to better acquaint the campus with the services they have to offer.

Consequences and contributions. In its *Seventh Annual Report* (1987), PACCR stated that "it is clear to the members of PACCR that many important changes have been brought about as a result of the review process, particularly when a unit wants the effort to be productive" (p. 2). With respect to how units assessed the success of the review process, PACCR observed that in the early 1980s the obtaining of new positions was sometimes a criterion, whereas in the later years units were more aware of the value of reviews in the long-range process of program improvement (p. 2).

Three specific examples of improvement were provided in PACCR's *Seventh Annual Report*. First, the Registrar considered that the URC analysis of problems about registration procedures encouraged his office to adopt a system of telephone registration more quickly than might otherwise have occurred. Second, the Department of English reported in its Unit Response that the extensive involvement of virtually all staff members in the response led to more careful attention to problems and to improved morale. Third, the Faculty of Extension was complimentary about the contribution of the self-study process toward increasing awareness of role, challenges, strengths, limitations, and issues. Also, URC Reports provided stimuli for reflection and action in their recommendations, criticisms, and suggestions. PACCR also made this candid assessment in its *Seventh Annual Report* (1987):

> We do not wish to pretend, however, that the results of reviews have been uniformly satisfactory. Much depends on the attitudes of the people in departments. When there is no will to bring about important changes, then little will happen. When there is such a will, particularly within the leadership of a unit, then much can and does happen. (p. 11)

Development of academic departments. Another matter mentioned in PACCR's *Eighth Annual Report* involved comments by some URCs about the life history of academic departments. The life cycle includes "initiation, a period of struggle to become established, a period of growth, and plateau period . . . [and] a period of decline through loss of staff or morale and displacement of goals" (p. 12). However, PACCR concluded that "careful monitoring and early detection of symptoms" can and should lead to appropriate action which can generate renewal.

Graduate programs. The University of Alberta included both undergraduate and graduate programs in the reviews of academic departments. While recognizing that graduate work is a highly individual undertaking and that departments must be given the widest degree of flexibility to design programs for their students, PACCR urged that special attention should be paid by both the department and the URC to

admission procedures, to the monitoring of progress, and to supervision of graduate students.

Reviewers indicated that it often takes too long for students to meet graduate degree requirements. The graduate thesis should be looked upon as a study introducing the candidate to the field of research, rather than as a definitive work on a given subject.

Handling major changes. Modern universities place increasing emphasis on research and scholarship. For some departments, this means facing the challenge of moving away from earlier emphases upon teaching and service. Besides modifying aims and programs, staff have to be reoriented. URCs have pointed out that such changes are difficult and that they require careful administration. They also noted the need to treat fairly those faculty members whose careers have developed under a different set of expectations.

Mission statements. Although PACCR was decidedly cool to development of mission statements, believing that the missions of units were well known, URCs frequently recommended that such statements be prepared. In its *Eighth Annual Report* (1988), PACCR recognized that mission statements sometimes can help units focus their priorities where resources are limited.

Replacement of retiring staff members. URCs often remarked that a significant number of staff members in a given department will be retiring in the next few years, and increasingly they have addressed the question of how they should be replaced. A frequent recommendation was that a department not replace a retiring staff member with a person in the same area of specialization, so that the department could move into new areas, or that relatively neglected areas within the department should be strengthened. PACCR recommended that URC comments concerning future appointments or directions be given to appointment committees.

Reviews and accreditation. In some professional faculties, concern existed about the overlap between PACCR and accreditation reviews, with the suggestion being made that the PACCR process be modified for professional departments. However, the purposes of the two types of reviews are different; accreditation relates to whether a unit is meeting the standards required for continuation, whereas the PACCR approach is directed towards improvement and planning. As part of the process of evaluating PACCR procedures, a faculty member with both PACCR and accreditation experience made these comments which were reproduced, with the consent of the faculty member, in PACCR's *Ninth Annual Report* (1989):

> 1. The PACCR review, in my estimation, is by far the most detailed and comprehensive of all the review processes I have been involved in. . . .
>
> 2. It forces a department chairman and his colleagues to examine themselves in their current context in comparison with other departments across the country and in related countries such as the U.K. and the U.S.A. Because of PACCR's firm (and correct) refusal to supply detailed forms (which often pose irrelevant, inapplicable, or unanswerable questions) the free-form presentation is left largely to the initiative of the department and its staff. This is a major benefit. One has to stand back and assess current and future issues in one's discipline as objectively as one can knowing that one will have external reviewers of such calibre that any dishonesty will be revealed immediately.
>
> 3. In the PACCR system the reviewers are free to interview people not listed as well as to reinterview. (This is also *theoretically* true of other surveys but time is so limited that, in practice, this is usually impossible logistically.)
>
> 4. A key to the success of the PACCR review is the careful and appropriate selection of reviewers. By picking men or women who are eminent, respected and fair and who mostly will have encountered similar problems in the same discipline one ensures understanding of local and *individual* difficulties of funding, shortages of staff, and the rest, which may escape the attention of others. . . .
>
> 5. Another factor adding to the quality of the PACCR reviews is that most disciplines in Canada are reasonably small communities and we meet each

other on a regular basis; so the reviewer must be responsible and be able to look his colleagues in the eye without, at the same time, playing favorites or doing a whitewash job.

Reviews of non-standard units. Institutes and centres, which are usually attached to departments or faculties but which sometimes are free-standing, may be vulnerable in times of financial restriction. Regardless of whether or not they have advocates, non-standard units should neither benefit nor suffer disproportionately because of their special status.

Teaching service function of departments. Departments in the Faculties of Arts and Science have long ago accepted the principle of service to other faculties. That, however, is not always the case in professional faculties. URCs have on a number of occasions commented on the difficulties experienced by some departments when they need service courses. Some departments have felt compelled to appoint staff members to teach such courses. URCs have generally disapproved of such a practice.

Use of resources. URCs have commented that, in an environment of decreasing overall resources, the University and its units need to examine their operations carefully to ensure that resources are employed most effectively. They pointed to three areas in particular: (a) increasing cost recovery from trusts and grants; (b) restructuring of curriculum to ensure that it is relevant and current; and (c) assigning of support staff to assist a whole group of researchers rather than being assigned exclusively to one or two persons.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE REVIEWS

PACCR presented a set of recommendations in its *Seventh Annual Report* (1987) concerning how program reviews should be conducted once the first round was completed. After reflecting upon its procedures and alternatives, PACCR provided these ten recommendations:

1. That the PACCR process be repeated and built into the administrative structure of the University.

2. That the central role of the President be recognized and maintained.

3. That the Advisory Committee for steering the review process be made up of senior members of the University community who have wide experience and sound judgment, but do not hold administrative positions.

4. That the deans for academic units and associate vice-presidents for administrative/support units have the main responsibility for monitoring progress towards achieving agreed-upon recommendations arising from reviews, with the Vice-President (Academic) or Vice-President (Administration) retaining overall monitoring responsibilities.

5. That the President have a reasonable sum of money each year to be used to respond to the findings of reviews.

6. That program improvement continue to be the major objective of reviews.

7. That the reviews be carried out as part of a process in which a unit examines its current strengths and limitations and with a strong forward-looking emphasis.

8. That the reports of Unit Review Committees continue to be treated with considerable confidentiality.

9. That single review teams, typically involving two external and two internal reviewers, continue to be the norm.

10. That practices and procedures currently being used be carefully reexamined and adapted for the longer-term future.

EVALUATION OF THE PACCR PROCESS

By December 1988, when over 80% of all academic and support units had been reviewed, President Myer Horowitz, as Chairman of the General Faculties Council, asked that a small committee examine the future role of PACCR. (The General Faculties Council is equivalent to a Senate in many other universities.)

This Examining Committee, which consisted of an Associate Dean of Science as Chairman, the Dean of Rehabilitation Medicine, and the Registrar, conducted extensive interviews and obtained 90 written responses from University staff who had served on URCs. Three general questions were addressed; the statements of these questions and responses to them are provided below.

Question 1: "What is your perception of the benefits derived from the PACCR process, and have these benefits outweighed the direct and indirect costs?"

Cost-benefit relationships. While 24 respondents assessed that the benefits resulting from the PACCR process outweighed the costs, 5 provided a contrary opinion, and 11 were either undecided or could not make a judgment. Three said that the benefits "far outweighed" the costs, but two conditionally favored the benefits--one required that the reviewed unit needed to be committed to improvement and the other that the URC recommendations be implemented. Those who assessed that the costs outweighed the benefits provided these individual comments: the new chair was more influential than the review process; staff could have performed more research had they not been as involved in the review; the process is incredibly expensive, but no alternative was apparent; the funds involved could be better used; and an enormous amount of staff time was involved.

Benefits. Respondents identified a variety of benefits, some quite general and others more specific. The general benefits were identified in remarks such as the following: (a) the review was very useful and informative; (b) the impact has been profound and extremely useful; (c) the review led to organizational renewal and affirmation of the importance of the work of the unit; (d) the review made necessary and worthwhile contributions to the life and work of the University; (e) reviews have been a major success; (f) the reviews produced a very significant benefit to many, and probably most, of the departments reviewed; (g) a cathartic effect was produced and restorative action initiated; (h) a positive experience was provided for all involved; and (i) a positive attitude was developed towards evaluation. Four respondents stated that, by implementing a comprehensive review system, the University of Alberta was giving a clear message to government and others that it was serious about improving the quality of its operations.

The more specific benefits related to these matters: (a) the impression that financial resource allocation had been placed on a better basis; (b) departments have been made more cohesive; (c) planning has been assisted; (d) an awareness of accountability, effectiveness, and purpose was generated; and (e) an enhanced communal appreciation of and responsibility to students, colleagues, the university, and society was developed.

Costs. The direct annual central costs of the PACCR process were about $225,000 for PACCR operations (staff, PACCR office expenses, and URC expenses). Direct costs to units being reviewed mainly consisted of expenses involved in preparation of Self-Study Reports such as duplicating, holding of retreats, and hiring temporary staff. PACCR provided up to $500 per unit to assist with some of the direct costs. As noted by some respondents, the indirect costs to the units were probably more significant; several reported that substantial staff time was involved, leading to loss of

productivity in research and publication. Preparation of the Self-Study Report was frequently very demanding for the head of the unit.

Self-study reports. These reports were generally well prepared, and many respondents considered that they constituted the most valuable part of the whole review process. Having a department involved in self-study activity was perceived to lead to more cohesion, to reflection by staff members about their place in their disciplines and the university, to focusing attention upon fundamentally important questions, to generation of greater awareness among staff of potentials and problems, to preparation of department plans, and to identification of aspects which needed strengthening and changes which were required in administrative practices in the department. Two respondents also commented on the benefit provided to senior administrators and to members of the Planning and Priorities Committee by reading the Self-Study Reports--they were able to learn a great deal about individual academic and support units.

Unit Review Committees. Substantial support was evident for the review process to involve external non-partisan experts--"essential," "very important," "valuable," and "useful" were the terms commonly used. External reviewers were seen as "credible sources" of comment who could serve to validate conclusions of the Self-Study Report. These individual comments were provided: (a) comparison with other units could lead to promotion of excellence; (b) major benefits can be obtained if the URC is chaired by an excellent outside reviewer; (c) a major psychological boost can result if the image of the unit as excellent is confirmed; (d) the review is more useful if the external experts are willing to listen to the views of unit members; and (e) the review can enhance the image of the unit with external experts. Use of both external and internal members on the URC was generally supported.

PACCR. University administrators agreed that a small, knowledgeable group of senior respected staff members, not involved in day-to-day administration, formed an appropriate committee to organize the review process. Much of the success of the reviews was attributed to this committee. PACCR members were also praised for their ability to identify and elaborate upon important campus-wide issues.

Follow-up activities. The extent to which follow-up activities were conducted varied considerably among units. Several respondents identified such activities as being the weakest aspect of the review process. At the conclusion of the review activities, the President decided whether additional resources would be allocated. After that, successful follow-up was seen to depend largely upon efforts of deans and chairs. While respondents recognized that not all of the URC recommendations should necessarily be implemented, several remarked that more publicity should be given to both the President's decision and the activities of the faculty and department pursuant to the recommendations.

Involvement of the President. Active involvement of the President was universally viewed as a major factor which led to success of the PACCR reviews. The President was seen to perform important psychological, informational, and educational functions. However, some respondents considered that the President's active involvement in any future reviews should be somewhat reduced.

Overall impressions. Two major attributes of the PACCR process were that it was perceived to be non-threatening and that academics came to recognize that reviews are essential for the health of the university. *Over 80% of respondents considered that the review process should continue and that many of the current practices should be retained.* The greatest frustration experienced by those involved related to the lack of resources available to implement the URCs' recommendations.

Question 2: "Should some form of systematic reviews occur in the 1990s?"

The distribution of responses was as follows: Yes–39; No–9; Undecided–2. Respondents also provided some elaboration either to justify or to elaborate upon their choice. Of the 39 who responded favorably, 17 specified these preferred time frames: once every 10 years (5); once every 10–15 years (2); once every 8–10 years (2); after 1995 (2); a different type for 1990–99, followed by PACCR type again in 2000 (1); more frequent than 10 years, but "stripped down" (1); about every 7 years (1); after a 6–year gap (1); once every 20 or 30 years (1); and hold reviews of support units every 10 years and academic units every 15 years (1). Some of these 17 respondents elaborated on their choice in these ways: (a) reviews provide an opportunity for redirection and stimulation; (b) the momentum should be continued; (c) the university community has the right to know of the benefits from the 1980–1990 reviews; (d) a broader base perspective [unspecified] is needed; (e) we should build on the 1980–1990 experience and omit irrelevant data; (f) retirements, demographic changes, and increasing percentages of adult students warrant continuation of the reviews; and (g) continuation is defensible if reasonable recommendations have a reasonable chance of realization.

Those who were against continuation provided those comments: (a) once is sufficient; (b) a new vision is needed; (c) we should wait for five years before deciding; (d) cooperation would be reduced if PACCR continued; (e) reviews would meet hostility when dollars are short and workload is high; and (f) repetition would indicate that the 1980–90 experience was unsuccessful. The two who were undecided stated that (a) we need to obtain information from units about improvements which can clearly be linked to the PACCR process, and (b) while the reviews of support units are very worthwhile, those of academic units are of questionable value.

Question 3: "If your answer is yes to the previous question, then how would you structure the reviews for the 1990s?"

Many suggestions were made about how any next cycle of reviews should be conducted: use the current PACCR model (7 respondents); use the current PACCR model but have more potential for budget adjustment (2); use the current PACCR model with the 1980s reviews as benchmarks (1); use the current PACCR model if the post–review process has worked well (1); and monitor progress now and start PACCR–style reviews again in 2000 (1). Four suggested that the procedures could be more streamlined, while one called for less rigidity. Five addressed the related matters of better follow–up activities, more feedback, greater capacity to fund recommendations, difficulties experienced in implementation, and ensuring that recommendations are implemented--these would all require changes in procedures.

With respect to the Self–Study Reports, two recommended tighter guidelines, two that the existing reports be used again, two that the existing reports be updated, one that annual reports be used for updating the reports, and one that Self–Study Reports should be distributed to other departments in the same faculty.

Only a few recommendations were made about the Unit Review Committees: use them only when necessary (1 respondent); use URCs consisting of three external experts (including at least one from outside Canada) and one University of Alberta staff member from a related field (1); the URCs should spend one week on campus during which the written report would be prepared (1); and a new–style URC--consisting of one external expert, one member of the original URC, and one University of Alberta member who would serve on several such committees--should be used to review a department's assessment of its successes and failures following the 1980s review (1).

Several respondents recommended these foci

in any subsequent cycle: faculties as administrative units (5 mentions); appropriate groups of departments (3); units that require in-depth reviews again (3); examine the 1980s reviews and recommendations (3); undergraduate programs (2); our role in society (1); enhancing teaching effectiveness (1); new research thrusts (1); graduate programs (1); external research funding (1); staffing (1); capital equipment (1); committees (1); and research institutes (1).

Negative Reactions

In addition to the perceived costs and implied criticisms in the responses listed above, a few respondents identified these negative aspects of the first cycle: (a) recommendations of one URC were not useful and were discarded; (b) the process was divisive, as the URC was seen as either a savior or a threat; (c) no format was established within which the URC recommendations were to be implemented; (d) the reviews were rather superficial; (e) the reviewers rarely put the unit members sufficiently off balance in order to get at the truth; and (f) the departments were incorrectly called to account for developments and conditions over which they had no control.

Recommendations

The Examining Committee made the following recommendations:

1. A second cycle of reviews be implemented at the University of Alberta to evaluate units' programs, goals and priorities in terms of the institutional goals and objectives.

2. The second cycle of reviews provide an information base for the effective allocation of human and physical resources.

3. The present PACCR process continue until all units have been reviewed, presumably by 1991, and that the second cycle begin without interruption.

4. The senior administration consider the stated goals and objectives of the University so that a second cycle of reviews can be developed in harmony with the overall strategic plan of the University.

5. The reviews in the second cycle start with the terms of reference for each unit being set by a committee consisting of the Dean of the Faculty, the Chairperson of the Department, and a person from the senior administration who is intimately involved in planning. Full use should be made of the reports dealing with the unit's first cycle of reviews.

6. A Department Planning Report (no larger than 10 to 20 pages) be prepared by the unit before a site visit is initiated. This document should be accompanied by a complete set of curriculum vitae of all members of the academic staff in the unit, and for administrative and service units the staff profiles. [It would replace the Self-Study Report used in the first cycle of reviews.]

7. The entire cycle of reviews be completed within a five-year period, possibly followed by a hiatus before yet a third cycle is contemplated.

8. The process continue to have the involvement of the President and/or the Vice-Presidents.

9. The reviews proceed in such a fashion that subject-related units be reviewed at the same time, or as closely as possible, so that redundancies may be reduced and beneficial interactions pursued.

10. The PACCR committee remain a President's committee, small in number (possibly four), and that the chairperson be a member of the senior administration. The others should be respected personnel having extensive experience within the University, and release time should be considered.

11. The composition of the Unit Review Committees remain essentially unchanged.

12. Greater emphasis be given by the senior administration to the evaluation and the follow-up of recommendations.

Result

Although the Examining Committee recommended a second review cycle in which some of the procedures used in the first cycle would be modified, the University decided not to undertake such an activity at this time. The main reasons for this decision related to current

fiscal problems and to the involvement of the University in an extensive strategic planning exercise.

CONCLUDING COMMENTS

Based upon the very positive experience of the University of Alberta with program reviews from 1980 to 1991, as described above, and the opinions of various authors, the following general recommendations are offered for postsecondary institutions contemplating implementation of a system of program reviews.

1. Develop procedures slowly and thoughtfully, recognizing the need to generate trust and goodwill. Prepare an operating agreement and appropriate mechanisms which identify the purposes and the resources available, and emphasize the competence of reviewers.

2. Review all academic and support units, and review faculties and large support offices (e.g., physical plant) as overall administrative units after reviews of their constituent departments have been completed.

3. Place primary emphasis upon program improvement, but also recognize that information from program reviews can help with budget and planning decisions.

4. Use a small President's Advisory Committee chaired by an academic who is not currently an administrator, with all members being highly respected and sensitive members of the campus community.

5. Incorporate the President's Advisory Committee into the institution's administrative structure and endeavor to ensure continuity of membership.

6. Ensure that adequate and appropriate data are available throughout the review process.

7. Use four reports in the review process: a Self-Study Report, a Unit Review Committee Report, a Unit Response, and a confidential President's Advisory Committee summary. Emphasize that the self-study activity will frequently be the most important phase of the process.

8. Use one review team consisting of external experts and knowledgeable internal members. The chair should be one of the external members.

9. Whenever possible and appropriate, attempt to integrate aspects of external accreditation and internal review processes to reduce the evaluative load upon professional departments.

10. Ensure that the reviewing procedures are open and clearly understood, but treat the reports with appropriate confidentiality.

11. When it is clear that poor administrative performance contributes to difficulties within the unit being reviewed, and even though the primary emphasis should be on program improvement, then senior administrators should be prepared to take appropriate firm action.

12. Set aside a reasonable amount of money each year in a Review Adjustment Fund so that some units can receive increased funding in response to the reviews.

13. The President's Advisory Committee needs to recognize that the subject of teaching loads is a contentious one in which there are vested interests. Depending on the assumptions made, almost any department can claim a heavy teaching load compared with other departments. The Committee should discourage units from making statements about these matters, which are likely to be unproductive, in their Self-Study Reports. We strongly recommend that President's Advisory Committees, and faculty members in general, carefully read pages 41–47 of PACCR's *Tenth Annual Report.*

14. Consider use of a written Memorandum of Agreement at the conclusion of the review process in order to ensure adequate follow-up activities. Charge deans, associate vice-presidents, and directors, as appropriate, with responsibility for monitoring implementation of such Memoranda. Allocate responsibility for monitoring overall implementation of Memoranda of Agreement with the appropriate Vice-President.

15. Request that the President provide public annual reports in which the allocations to units from the Review Adjustment Fund are described.

16. Ensure that the reviews consider the teaching, research, and service activities of the units, as appropriate; that they obtain the opinions of students in an organized manner; and that in their emphasis upon improvement they resist attempts to rank units in comparison with peer units in other institutions.

In conclusion, we wish to state that the review experience at the University of Alberta has been overwhelmingly positive and that we agree with Taylor et al. (1988) that all postsecondary institutions should be involved in some form of continuous review activity. Of course, not all of the procedures that we adopted and used were perfect and not all aspects of the review experience met with campus-wide approval. But the minor deficiencies and costs of any review system which has been carefully planned should not substantially detract from its overall benefits. Serious resource and planning difficulties are confronting most postsecondary institutions; the information obtained from reviews can be of substantial significance when these difficulties are being addressed. Apart from that benefit, the potential gains in improvement of quality of many aspects of academic and support operations warrant adoption of some thorough, ongoing system of institutional self-examination.

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The authors wish to acknowledge the assistance provided by other members of the University of Alberta community in the preparation of this paper, especially former President Dr. M. Horowitz, O.C., the other PACCR members-Dr. F. Enns, the late Dr. H. Kreisel, O.C., and Mr. W. H. Jopling--and Mr. M. Arnal, Mrs. T. Kremer, Mr. R. Lamoureux, Ms. N. Mattson, Dr. S. O. Michael, Mrs. S. Moore, and Dr. J. M. Small. The cooperation of the 17 Vice-Presidents (Academic) who provided information about their review procedures is greatly appreciated.

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